

February 21, 2003

Mr. Dennis Shea
Executive Director
President's Commission on the United States Postal Service
1120 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Suite 971
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Mr. Shea:

On behalf of the Congressional Black Caucus, we respectfully submit the following comments regarding the extremely important issues before the Commission on the United States Postal Service.

President Bush established the Commission on the United States Postal Service on the premise that modern telecommunications, the Internet, electronic transfers and electronic bill paying may justify or require changes in the Postal Service. However, millions of Americans, especially those who are economically disadvantaged and older Americans, do not have access to these means of communication. For them, the Postal Service continues to provide the only practical and available means of communication and commerce. Any change to the Postal Service that would affect the continued availability of universal mail service at uniform rates would threaten to further erode their economic security.

Some advocates of changes in the Postal Service also advocate privatization of the Postal Service. That movement, too, is based on the false premise that we may be able to dispense with the provision of universal service. For Americans in our rural areas and for many in our inner cities, a profit motive cannot support provision of essential services. This has always been and must remain the responsibility of our government. It is essential that there remain a universal postal system that spreads the cost of maintaining universal service among all those who use it. Any change that would favor the efficiency of private markets over the public interest in communications among all Americans would further isolate Americans who are already disadvantaged by economic circumstance or geographical location. We urge you not to support any policy that might permit that to happen.

We also want to caution against any change that would undermine the economic security of postal employees. In the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970, Congress recognized that employees of the former Post Office Department of the federal government were severely underpaid and labored in very unfavorable working conditions. In that Act, Congress improved postal wages and provided for free collective bargaining by unions representing postal employees. That system has worked very well. In the more than thirty years since Congress authorized the last wage increase for postal employees, postal wages have kept pace with inflation, and there has been no major work stoppage of the sort that disrupted postal services in 1970.

The Postal Service employs hundreds of thousands of women, African-Americans and other racial minorities. For many of these postal employees, the fact that the Postal Service provides a living wage and adequate fringe benefits, regardless of race or gender, has been critically important. This is in contrast to the private sector of our economy, where there remains an unfortunate disparity between the employment opportunities and compensation available to white males and the opportunities and compensation available to women and racial minorities. Therefore, any effort to dismantle the Postal Service would be a regressive step, contrary to our national effort to provide equal employment opportunities for women and racial minorities.

In the same vein, we are mindful of the large number of veterans employed by the Postal Service. Our promises and commitment to these veterans must not be forgotten or diminished. In their military service, and in their postal service, these veterans have served their country. It is necessary and appropriate that we continue to recognize their sacrifices by providing them preferential employment opportunities in government positions, including positions in the Postal Service.

Thank you for your careful consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

s/

Elijah E. Cummings
Chair, CBC

s/

Danny K. Davis
Ranking Member, Special Committee on Postal Services

cc: Mr. James Johnson, Co-Chair, President's Commission on the United States Postal Service
Mr. Harry Pearce, Co-Chair, President's Commission on the United States Postal Service
Members of the Congressional Black Caucus